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INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE

RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE

RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 0205

RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0236

RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA 0391

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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

RHMFIS/CDR USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE

RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 0148

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NOUAKCHOTT 000313

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TAGS: PREL PGOV PHUM PINR EAID KPAO MR

SUBJECT: AFRO-MAURITANIAN COALITION PESSIMISTIC ABOUT ELECTIONS

REF: NOUAKCHOTT 87

Classified By: Amb. Joseph LeBaron, Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

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(C) Key Points  
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-- In a meeting with PolOff March 13, Mohamed Ould Sidi Ould Dellahi, President of the Afro-Mauritanian political party coalition "Group of Parties for Change," said the coup did not represent a significant change for Mauritania, nor would elections bring about such a change.

-- "The same group that was in power before the coup is still in power," Dellahi said, adding that this group will influence the elections to ensure that "one of their own" or someone who will "protect their interests" wins.

-- Dellahi said that the risk for civil war and internal conflict following the elections was high, as expectations for change among Afro-Mauritanians would not be realized.

-- Dellahi claimed that two men recently threatened to kill him if he didn't stop calling for the return of refugees and the protection of Afro-Mauritanians' human rights.

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(C) Comments  
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-- Dellahi, a White Moor, is well-known for supporting Afro-Mauritanian issues, but is often extreme in his views. While we do not agree with his gloom and doom assessment of a coming civil war, his fears of "subtle" White Moor influence on the electoral process are likely well-founded.

-- Dellahi's perspective also highlights the national division between moderate and radical Afro-Mauritanian political leanings.

End Key Points and Comments.

¶1. (U) On March 13 PolOff met with Mohamed Ould Sidi Ould Dellahi, President of the "Group of Parties for Change," the leading Afro-Mauritanian political party coalition, to discuss the outlook for Afro-Mauritanians in the coming elections.

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"ELECTIONS WON'T CHANGE A THING"

¶2. (C) Dellahi began the meeting by stressing that the August 3 coup did not/not represent a significant change in the Mauritanian power structure, nor would elections bring about such a change. "The same group that was in power before the coup is still in power," Dellahi said, adding that "the only difference is that Taya is gone." Dellahi explained that the coup was nothing more than "those with power becoming nervous about Taya's management and hold over the country, and deciding that their interests would be better served by someone else."

¶3. (C) Dellahi predicted that this "power base" will "influence" the elections to ensure that "one of their own" or someone who will "protect their interests" will come to power.

¶4. (C) According to Dellahi such influence will be subtle. "By not allowing Afro-Mauritanian refugees to return, they will ensure victory for White Moor candidates," he said, also adding that "by not having public financing for political parties, they will be able to use their significant wealth to ensure that their own candidates win." "Their influence is not in the open, but behind closed doors, and this influence has already begun," Dellahi said, adding that "we have seen it in many of the decisions the government has already made."

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POTENTIAL FOR CIVIL WAR

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¶5. (C) Dellahi said that the risk for civil war and internal conflict following the elections was high, as expectations for change would not be realized. "Many Afro-Mauritanians believe that these elections will improve their lives," Dellahi said, adding that "on the current electoral path, this simply won't happen, and when the people realize it they'll respond."

¶6. (C) Dellahi stressed that civil war was not inevitable. "If the government addresses the refugee issue and provides a fair electoral environment for all citizens and parties, then real change could be possible," Dellahi said. "If the people feel that they at least have a voice, and the opportunity for change, they will accept that."

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DEATH THREAT

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¶7. (C) Dellahi claimed that two men recently threatened to kill him if he didn't stop calling for the return of refugees and the enhanced protection of Afro-Mauritanians' human rights. According to Dellahi, these men were sent by the influential "power base" including the well-connected local businessman Mohamed Hmayen Bouamatou. Dellahi explained that he reported the incident to the local police, but that the men were not arrested "because of the police's fear of Bouamatou."

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APPRECIATION FOR US ROLE AND PLEA FOR HELP

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¶8. (C) Dellahi thanked PolOff for the embassy's positive stance on the plight of Afro-Mauritanians. Specifically, he cited the importance of the Ambassador's recent trip to refugee camps in northern Senegal (reftel). "Ambassador LeBaron's visit drew needed attention to the issue and will make it more difficult for the current or following

government to ignore these people," Dellahi said.

¶19. (C) Dellahi concluded the meeting with a call for U.S. assistance. "Without financial support, Afro-Mauritanian political parties will not be able to effectively rally our people together," Dellahi said, adding that "without continued political pressure, this government will do little to address Afro-Mauritanian issues." He repeated his fears about civil war and internal conflict, adding that "for elections and democracy to work here, we will need the help of our democratic friends."

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THE COALITION  
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¶110. (C) The Group of Parties for Change is a coalition of four political parties: The Alliance for Justice and Democracy (AJD), The Party for Liberty Equality and Justice (PLEJ), The Mauritanian Labor Party (PTM), and The Mauritanian Party for the Protection of the Environment (PMDE). AJD and PLEJ are two of the three main Afro-Mauritanian political parties. The third, The Popular Progressive Alliance (APP), is not a member of the coalition. While PTM and Dellahi's PMDE party are not technically Afro-Mauritanian parties, both groups have a long history of supporting the Afro-Mauritanian cause.

LeBaron